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## Politics and Morality through the Lens of Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*

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### Abstract

*Sallust, with apparent sense of moral obligation wrote Bellum Catalinae (Catiline War) as it were, to relieve his experience of corruption and bribery in politics during the Roman Republic. Interpretably, the work has another thrust: the place of morality in politics. This article features how, particularly through characterization of Catiline, a politician's desire for supremacy is presented as borne out of his innate self-serving disposition and hardly any incline of morality, love of country or self-sacrifice. By profiling some of the associates of Catiline in his conspiracy, the paper also indicates how moral decay made ambition to excel for personal advancement supersede genuine interest in the good of the commonwealth. Attention is further drawn to how loyalty, duty disciplinewas eroded with the lure of luxury, women wine. The paper notes that the debauched Sallust's Catiline got recruits for his revolt, not only from among the embittered disadvantaged lowly citizens, but also from models of moral scourge which beset his society among thenobility. This paper concludes that Sallust, through Bellum Catalinae, depicts how a state can become endangered by politicians who are morally debased.*

**Keywords:** Politics, Roman Republic, Moral degeneracy, Bellum Catalinae

### 1. Introduction

The place of moral in politics, considering the events of the twilight of the Roman republic, would inevitably be a theme for discussion. Concerning the subject, a prominent Roman politician of the period, Catiline, who supposedly turned to a conspirator when he lost in elections (Salmon, 1935: 312), is the focus of this paper. The account of Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*, the primary Classical source used, although removed in time from contemporary political developments, lucidly presents a picture that matches the notion of politics as 'a dirty game ... practiced by dirty people' (Uzorma, 2016:1). Through characterisation of Catiline, much is said by Sallust about how eroding moral values precipitate political disintegration and upheavals. The ancient work is used to interrogate the gloomy view of moral degeneracy in politics which is 'littered with criminal elements clad in saintly garb' (Olaguro, 2016:1). In the light of the overriding mentality of what is called 'do-or-die' (Muhammad, 2015) politics, Catiline's account here interpreted as a treatise on how a politician's defective morals become the harbinger of violence, spates of murder, deception and all imaginable evil means. It represents securing political power for egotistic pleasure.

Sallust wrote an account of Catiline's conspiracy (63 B.C.) to characterise a period in Roman history, when 'allegedly virtuous life of early Rome was continually contrasted with the decadent mores of subsequent times' (Daloz, 2010: 9). Associating Catiline's conspiracy with other famous cataclysmic events of the last century of the Roman Republic, Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae* complements the view of Catiline as an embodiment of 'all of the evils festering in the declining Roman republic' (Daloz, 2010: 9). Catiline's failure as a politician at the time of unstable political and economic conditions is summed up thus:

*Catilina bis repulsam in petitione consulatus passus cum Lentulo praetore et Cethego et compluribus aliis coniuravit de caede consulum et senatus, incendiis urbis et obprimenda re p., exercitu quoque in Etruria comparato. Ea coniuratio industria M. Tulli Ciceronis eruta est. Catilina urbe pulso, de reliquis coniuratis supplicium sumptum est.*

Lucius Catilina, who had twice been defeated during consular elections, conspired with praetor Lentulus, Cethegus and many others. They wanted to kill the consuls and senators, set fire to the city, and overthrow the republic. Their army was ready in Etruria. The conspiracy was suppressed by the energy of Marcus Tullius Cicero. When Catilina had been expelled from the city, the other conspirators were executed. (Livy, *Periochae*, 102)

Catiline has received both condemnation and exaltation from scholars. His detractors denounce him without reservations as a morally and politically corrupt person who would do all to get power. They claim that 'Catiline headed a band of corrupt aristocrats... having nothing else in mind but his own pecuniary and political interests, he stirred up the masses to bring havoc' (Yavetz, 1963: 485). Another view represents Catiline as the leader of bankrupt nobles. His group, whose number steadily increased, had spent fortunes on elections and became disgruntled when they had no opportunities of profiting from State's or provincial appointments (Yavetz, 1963: 486).

It is opined that the failure of the aristocrats to recover from the debts they incurred in recurring unsuccessful electoral campaigns led to their supporting a revolution. Nevertheless, when the lead of Cicero (*In Catalinam* 2, 18) and Sallust (*Bellum Catilinae*), which concurs with Plutarch's (*Cicero*, 10), is followed, 'indebtedness, or straitened financial circumstances [were the] unfortunate conditions ... common enough at all times ... in the rather disordered society and economy of Rome and Italy' (Waters, 1970: 204). Hence, the consequent inequality in the distribution of the State's resources was admittedly also a factor that made the Roman political terrain a sphere already ripe for a revolution.

However, the personality of Catiline as a politician in the unfolding conspiracy similarly means a lot and, indeed, the major issue in this paper. Concerning his qualifications, the belief is that he was no amateurish politician and 'he knew what could and could not be accomplished. Consequently, he approached all his difficulties from a rational point of view' (Allen Jr., 1938:70) This suggests a clever politician who is generally inclined to taking well premeditated political actions and who would not settle for sheer risk-taking. However, of more interest here is how Catiline is characterised by Sallust. The view of the politician as a menace to the Roman republic is certainly not universal. Interestingly, among both ancient and modern writers, the view exists that Cicero and Sallust, with craft of persuasive speeches and moralising history writing respectively, are guilty of exaggeration that unjustly depicts Catiline as 'arch-villain of the unstable and unpleasant political world of the late Republic' (Waters, 1970: 195).

When Catiline's efforts at getting mass support are considered, it may be reasoned that 'Cicero was himself trying to gain supporters by [his] speech, so why find fault with Catiline for doing the same thing?' (Marshall, 1974: 806). Cicero, it is also alleged, 'exaggerated the danger of Catiline in order to magnify his own achievement in suppressing the conspiracy' (Phillips, 1976: 442). It may not be easy to dismiss the notion that Cicero's hostility was the motive behind his representation or misrepresentation of Catiline as a worst enemy of the state. Besides, 'the ancient sources for the Catilinarian Conspiracy of 63 B. C. are at times confused and misleading' (Phillips, 1976: 441).

Nevertheless, that Catiline was the brain behind and the chief executor of the conspiracy at 63 B.C. has generated no serious debate, if at all any. Furthermore, it would be herculean for Cicero to persistently fabricate lies that roused so much indignation against Catiline. On the premise that 'Catiline's extreme proposals and hot-headed behaviour could easily have given rise to the not unnatural suspicion that he was bent on revolution' (Phillips, 1976: 442) rather makes it much easier to see a culpable Catiline. While Sallust's *Bellum Catilinae*'s narration is in no way free from partisan flaw, yet, there is no doubt that the historical work makes the controversial character of Catiline, which was climaxed by the events of 63 B.C., come to life. Basically, without debating scholars' differing judgments on the conspiracy here, attempt is made to profile Sallust's Catiline as a politician whose behaviours and activities would ultimately cause great concern and grave cataclysms for the State.

## 2. Roman Politics in the Pangs of Moral Breakdown

Sallust aptly mentions the trends in politics of his time that would shape his writing about Catiline. Recounting his experience in politics, he says: 'I encountered many obstacles; for instead of modesty, incorruptibility and honesty, shamelessness, bribery and rapacity held sway' (Sal. Cat. 3). The historian hints on serious moral issues in the prelude to his portrayal of one of the public corrupting influences of the last century of the republic. Although he intends to document, as much as possible, an authentic account of Catiline's conspiracy and the critical consequences, to him, Catiline's personality most deserves a specific mention (Sal. Cat. 4).

The Roman senator who attempted to overthrow the Republic is introduced thus:

Lucius Catiline, scion of a noble family, had great vigour both of mind and body, but an evil and depraved nature. From youth up, he revelled in civil wars, murder, pillage, and political dissension, and amid these he spent his early manhood. His body could endure hunger, cold and want of sleep to an incredible degree; his mind was reckless, cunning, treacherous, capable of any form of pretence or concealment. Covetous of others' possessions, he was prodigal of his own; he was violent in his passions. He possessed a certain amount of eloquence, but little discretion. His disordered mind ever craved the monstrous, incredible, gigantic. (Sal. Cat. 5)

Added to the expression, 'scion of a noble family', which praises Catiline's illustrious pedigree, is his excellent mental capacity as well as beautiful physique, the 'great vigour both of mind and body'. However, Sallust quickly points to a disquieting thought about his character by associating him with 'evil and depraved nature'. The historian paints a picture of an individual with a menacing outlook from childhood who 'revelled in civil wars, murder, pillage, and political dissension'. Attributing all villainous traits to Catiline, Sallust describes him as 'reckless, cunning, treacherous, capable of any form of pretence or concealment'. Complementing the violent and deceptive outlook is his extravagance that is accompanied by his being 'Covetous of others' possessions'. Furthermore, Sallust, while admitting that 'He possessed a certain amount of eloquence', quickly adds 'little discretion' that belittles the quality, thereby introducing a senator with 'a disordered mind' who would make frantic efforts to grab power, even at the detriment of the state.

Although Catiline is represented as debauched, Sallust is apt to note that societal decadence is implicit in the politician's behaviour: 'He was spurred on, also, by the corruption of the public morals, which were being ruined by two great evils of an opposite character, extravagance and avarice' (Sal. Cat. 6.7,8). Sallust feels obliged to hold his society morally responsible, hence, he goes back in time to how the Roman progenitors 'governed the commonwealth, how great it was when

they bequeathed it to [the next generation], and how by gradual changes it has ceased to be the noblest and best, and has become the worst and most vicious'. (Sal. Cat. 6.9). The historian reminisces the good old days when an average Roman man 'took more pleasure in handsome arms and war horses than in harlots and revelry ... [and when] they considered riches, this fair fame and high nobility' (Sal. Cat. 7.4). Sallust further drives home his point about his preference for the former society, which placed less emphasis on material acquisition, when he adds: 'It was praise they coveted, but they were lavish of money; their aim was unbounded renown, but only such riches as could be gained honourably' (Sal. Cat. 7.6).

By depicting the earlier times as golden, Sallust here unmistakably associates virtuous moral principles with public service. The glorious period he extols as follows:

Accordingly, good morals were cultivated at home and in the field; there was the greatest harmony and little or no avarice; justice and probity prevailed among them, thanks not so much to laws as to nature. Quarrels, discord, and strife were reserved for their enemies; *citizen vied with citizen only for the prize of merit. They were lavish in their offerings to the gods, frugal in the home, loyal to their friends.* By practising these two qualities, boldness in warfare and justice when peace came, they watched over themselves and their country. In proof of these statements I present this convincing evidence: firstly, in time of war punishment was more often inflicted for attacking the enemy contrary to orders, or for withdrawing too tardily when recalled from the field, than for venturing to abandon the standards or to give ground under stress; and secondly, in time of peace they ruled by kindness rather than fear, and when wronged preferred forgiveness to vengeance. (Sal. Cat. 9). Italics are mine.

As Rome's resounding military conquests brought the nation to her renowned heights, honourable deeds smouldered as heinous acts gained more acceptance. Hence, 'lust for money [*avaritia* and *luxus*] first, then for power [*ambitio* and *cupido imperii*] ... these were ... the root of all evils. For avarice destroyed honour, integrity, and all other noble qualities' (Sal. Cat. 10). Sallust depicts gradual shoving aside of all sense of national interest as the stage became set for pursuit of all selfish ambitions until 'when the disease had spread like a deadly plague, the state was changed and a government second to none in equity and excellence became cruel and intolerable' (Sal. Cat. 10).

Scholars tend to generally agree that 'Roman overseas expansion and the importation of wealth brought about the political failure of the Republic, since unequal distribution of property between rich and poor led to ... the impoverishment of the peasant and political corruption' (Lintott, 1972: 626). However, the present Sallust's account closely brings in the theme of personal character in explaining the corrupt system. First, though, the historian prefaces Catiline's character evaluation with the role played by Sulla in the degeneration or rather destruction of values during the republic. Sallust relates:

Lucius Sulla, having gained control of the state by arms, brought everything to a bad end from a good beginning, all men began to rob and pillage. One coveted a house, another lands; the victors *showed neither moderation nor restraint*, but shamefully and cruelly wronged their fellow citizens. Besides all this, Lucius Sulla, in order to secure the loyalty of the army which he led into Asia, had allowed it a luxury and license foreign to the manners of our forefathers; and in the intervals of leisure those charming and voluptuous lands had easily demoralized the warlike spirit of his soldiers. There it was that an army of the Roman people first learned to indulge in women and drink; to admire statues, paintings, and chased vases, to steal them from private houses and public places, to pillage shrines, and to desecrate everything, both sacred and profane. These soldiers, therefore, after they had won the victory, left nothing to the vanquished. In truth, prosperity tries the souls of even the wise; how then should men of depraved character like these make a moderate use of victory? (Sal. Cat. 11. 4-7). Italics are mine.

The above words of Sallust agree with the reasoning that Sulla's era was the point when 'the pursuit of wealth after being a side-line to the pursuit of *potentia* [power] became ... an end in itself. (Lintott, 1972:628). Indeed, in describing the eroded values, striking are the expressions of Sallust: 'riches, luxury and greed, united with insolence, took possession of our young manhood. They pillaged, squandered; set little value on their own, coveted the goods of others; they disregarded modesty, chastity, everything human and divine; ... utterly thoughtless and reckless' (Sal. Cat. 12.2). The historian notes the religiosity of such men, which, perhaps, makes them more loathsome as plunderers of the state: 'But they adorned the shrines of the gods with piety, their own homes with glory ... basest of creatures, with supreme wickedness' (Sal. Cat. 12. 4, 5).

Sulla, a two-time Roman consul, had distinguished himself as a Roman general, dictator and statesman, achieving victories many times in wars against both internal external opponents. However, Sulla left indelible negative marks in the history of Rome and 'made himself hated by the people for his actions' (Levick, 1982: 508). One of his notorious actions was his treatment of his wealthy opponents. The image of his onslaught is vividly described below:

Sulla now busied himself with slaughter, and murders without number or limit filled the city. Many, too, were killed to gratify private hatreds, although they had no relations with Sulla, but he gave his consent in order to gratify his adherents. At last one of the younger men, Caius Metellus, made bold to ask Sulla in the senate what end there was to be of these evils, and how far he would proceed before they might expect such doings to cease. "We do not ask thee," he said, "to free from punishment those whom thou hast determined to slay, but to free from suspense those whom thou hast determined to save." And when Sulla answered that he did not yet know whom he would spare, "Well, then," said Metellus in reply, "let us know whom thou intendest to punish."... Be that as it may, Sulla at once proscribed eighty persons [80], without communicating with any magistrate; and in spite of the general indignation, after a single day's interval, he proscribed two hundred and twenty others [220], and then on the third day, as many more.

Referring to these measures in a public harangue, he said that he was proscribing as many as he could remember, and those who now escaped his memory, he would proscribe at a future time (Plut. Sull. 31.1-4).

No picture of ruthless, vicious killing may be gorier. The wanton murder was so motivated by unscrupulous desire to 'gratify private hatreds'. In the throes of slaying rampage, Sulla, as if on a mission to destroy anything of moral fibre, threw the seemingly helpless state into boundless confusion and gave a free rein to lust for blood. Sulla legitimised shameful betrayals 'to gratify his adherents', wrecking filial love as he clung to power. Below are more of his outrageous deeds:

He also proscribed anyone who harboured and saved a proscribed person, making death the punishment for such humanity, without exception of brother, son, or parents, but offering anyone who slew proscribed person two talents as a reward for this murderous deed, even though a slave should slay his master, or a son his father. And what seemed the greatest injustice of all, he took away the civil rights from the sons and grandsons of those who had been proscribed, and confiscated the property of all. Moreover, proscriptions were made not only in Rome, but also in every city of Italy, and neither temple of God, nor hearth of hospitality, nor paternal home was free from the stain of bloodshed, but husbands were butchered in the embraces of their wedded wives, and sons in the arms of their mothers. Those who fell victims to political resentment and private hatred were as nothing compared with those who were butchered for the sake of their property, nay, even the executioners were prompted to say that his great house killed this man, his garden that man, his warm baths another. Quintus Aurelius, a quiet and inoffensive man, who thought his only share in the general calamity was to condole with others in their misfortunes, came into the forum and read the list of the proscribed, and finding his own name there, said, "Ah! Woe is me! my Alban estate is prosecuting me." And he had not gone far before he was dispatched by someone who had hunted him down. (Plut. Sull. 31. 4-6).

In the atmosphere of vengeful murderous vendetta, uncertainty stared everyone in the face, so much that, 'even though a slave should slay his master or a son his father' it was a noble feat. It was not only a time for thirst for blood, lethal coveting of neighbours' property was bountifully rewarded. Hence, 'Those who fell victims to political resentment and private hatred were as nothing compared with those who were butchered for the sake of their property'; 'husbands were butchered in the embraces of their wedded wives, and sons in the arms of their mothers'. Such was the moral failure authored by one of the ambitious generals, Sulla (Sherwin-White, 1956:1). The era well illustrates how greed (*avaritia*) and ambition (*ambitio*) displaced quest for honour and selfless service to the state. Understandably, Sallust gives '*avaritia* pride of place as a more fundamental vice than *ambitio*, suggesting that, though hidden, it was leading the way all the time' (Lintott, 1972:628). While crave to serve the state persisted, greed, rather than desire for honour, became the dominant motivating force. As indicated by Sallust (Cat. 11. 5-6), the statesman, Sulla, created a perfect atmosphere for pursuit of all vices and indulgence in the name of public service. If such evil had existed before his time, he made it worse as 'we learn that through the visit to Asia of Sulla's army that the Roman soldier learnt the vices of drink and women and a taste for looting works of art' (Levick, 1982: 627).

It should be noted that greed, motivated by a chilling taste for luxury, actuated the minds of men seeking political offices by the time of Sulla. 'The passion which arose for lewdness, gluttony, and the other attendants of luxury was... strong' (Sal. Cat. 13. 3); it gained such acceptance that 'women offered their chastity for sale' (Sal. Cat. 13. 3); it was a new culture of 'vices that incited the young men to crime' (Sal. Cat. 13. 4); murderous crimes. The Roman society was so much engulfed by self-interested lifestyle that those in service to the state 'could not easily refrain from self-indulgence, and so they abandoned themselves the more recklessly to every means of gain as well as of extravagance' (Sal. Cat. 13. 4). There is no vagueness in various ancient writings on this state of moral breakdown in the Roman politics during the republic. Yet, Sallust makes Catiline the epitome.

### 3. Personification of Corruption

Sallust, having depicted features of a corrupt political system with the foregoing, goes on to characterise an individual who appears the best embodiment of corruption and who would fully exploit the vice-infested polity. The historian says: 'In a city so great and so corrupt Catiline found it a very easy matter to surround himself, as by a bodyguard, with troops of criminals and reprobates of every kind' (Sal. Cat. 14.1). The Roman political space had them all in great supply: 'wanton, glutton, or gamester [who] had wasted his patrimony in play, feasting, or debauchery; anyone who had contracted an immense debt that he might buy immunity from disgrace or crime' (Sal. Cat. 14.1). Available for the service of ambitious politicians were men who, in order to escape punishment for their various grievous crimes or seek refuge from debts, became ready tools for all sorts of fabrication and shedding intimate companions' blood. Besides these, there were others who, ostensibly to escape the shame of poverty, gave their minds to all sorts of monstrosity. These categories of citizens, to Catiline, were 'nearest and dearest' (Sal. Cat. 14.3).

While Sallust's Catiline, generally, was such a corruptive influence that left no one who desired to be blameless but found himself in his company innocent, it is of interest that his primary target were the youths, since, while 'still pliable as they were and easily moulded, were without difficulty ensnared by his wiles' (Sal. Cat. 14.5). To secure their loyalty, Catiline took undue advantage of the young one's exuberance, deploying all his material resources to tune their minds to immediate and sensual desires (Sal. Cat. 14.6). Catiline had got different "courses" in wicked arts to teach the youths: 'from their number he

supplied false witnesses and forgers; he bade them make light of honour, fortune, and dangers; ... sapped their good repute and modesty, he called for still greater crimes' (Sal. Cat. 16. 2). Such were not challenging "lessons" to assimilate in a society that was deeply imbued with passion for wealth, luxury and power, which had made many Romans to jettison traditional Roman values and warmly embrace avarice.

Apparently providing some insight into the making of a politician with such disquieting incline, Sallust goes on to paint Catiline's immoral and murderous past:

Even in youth Catiline had many shameful intrigues — with a maiden of noble rank, with a priestess of Vesta — and other affairs equally unlawful and impious. At last he was seized with a passion for Aurelia Orestilla, in whom no good man ever commended anything save her beauty; and when she hesitated to marry him because she was afraid of his stepson, then a grown man, it is generally believed that he murdered the young man in order to make an empty house for this criminal marriage (Sal. Cat. 15. 2-4).

Before outlining the present criminal deeds of the politician, Sallust draws attention to Catiline's early life of 'many shameful intrigues'. The past ignoble deeds include impious acts of defiling a temple virgin and the dastardly act of killing his wife and son 'to make an empty house for [a] criminal marriage' with wealthy and beautiful Aurelia Orestilla. Sallust would contrast these ugly moral records with his own belief that 'it is glorious to serve one's country by deeds' (Sal. Cat. 3.1). With the picture of a man who lacked control over his gluttony from his youth, Sallust begins in earnest, not only a portrayal of an indecent politician, but also builds the theme of how individuals of such incline corrupt and undermines the state when they have the means as well as some access to power.

#### 4. The Chief Conspirator and his Allies

Catiline had no difficulty in getting the needed hands to support his scheming to overthrow the state. Sallust shows that getting suitable recruits to overthrow the government was no hurdle since Catiline's 'own debt was enormous ... and because the greater number of Sulla's veterans, who had squandered their property and now thought with longing of their former pillage and victories, were eager for civil war' (Sal. Cat. 16. 4). The clamour for *novae tabulae* (literally, clean slates), 'which was meant either a reduction or an abolition of debts, is so common in the Ciceronian period' (Allen Jr., 1938:71). The people who had groaned under the burden of debt for long in Rome would only long for 'some spark which set fire to the train of gunpowder that indebtedness always dangerously offers to any revolutionary reformer' (Allen Jr., 1938:71). As it will shortly be shown by the economic policy of universal cancellation of debts (*tabulae novae*) enunciated in his speech, Catiline presented himself as the deliverer of the urban plebs from the plights of their debts.

However, indebtedness also affected another group of people who had enough experience in the military to aid the self-seeking politician: Sulla's veterans, who had squandered their property and ... were eager for civil war' to regain this. Besides, seeming lapses in the state's security well-suited Catiline's designs: 'There was no army in Italy; Gnaeus Pompeius was waging war in distant parts of the world; ... the senate was anything but alert; all was peaceful and quiet; this was his golden opportunity' (Sal. Cat. 16. 4). Catiline, after identifying the groups who would be sympathetic to his course, was set to employ persuasive speech to sway the emotions of 'all those who were most desperate and most reckless' (Sal. Cat. 17. 2). Among others, Sallust mentions 'The greater part of the young men also, in particular those of high position ... for although in quiet times they had the means of living elegantly or luxuriously, they preferred uncertainty to certainty, war to peace' (Sal. Cat. 17. 6). These became Catiline's fellows in conspiracy.

Catiline's involvement in what is called the First Catilinarian Conspiracy in 66/5 B. C. has been a contentious subject among scholars (Jones, 1939). For example, Phillips (1976) dismisses as unreliable Cicero's propaganda any association of Catiline with plans to overthrow government before 63 B.C.; yet, he admits that there is no sound basis for believing his scheming to seize power at 63B.C. was utter fabrication. As noted at the outset of this paper, scholars generally agree with the latter opinion of Phillips and this constitutes the premise for relating Catiline's character, as discussed above, to the development of 63 B.C. Concerning the political milieu at this time, what follows seems a good summary:

Catiline's behaviour at the time of the consular elections in 63 B.C. was alarming ... Cicero's actions would have been ridiculous if Catiline's activities were not causing concern at Rome. In fact, there is considerable evidence for political tension at the time. The problem of debt was particularly serious in 63 B.C. Although the year had so far passed without disorders, Catiline, in a bid to win votes, published a radical programme of debt relief and indigent Sullan veterans led by Manlius, as well as some of Sulla's victims, flocked to Rome to support him. Bribery was rampant and, on Cicero's instigation, a new bribery law was passed, which Dio says was directed against Catiline. Moreover, there was danger of violence. Catiline behaved menacingly towards another candidate, Sulpicius Rufus. He also threatened to destroy the Republic and, when Cato declared that he would prosecute him, made a violent reply, saying that he would extinguish any fire kindled against his fortunes with ruin, not water. (Phillips, 1976: 442).

Debt crisis had reached a climax by 63 B.C., providing an excellent setting for inciting a revolt. In addition to wooing the constituencies of the impoverished Sulla's veterans and the victims of Sulla's proscription with promise of debt cancellation, Catiline's purpose was served by bribery, which was already entrenched in the society. Indeed, he had perfect compliments for his outlandish behaviours, prompting his defiant threat of fire-for-fire.

Catiline's plot to wrest power intensified when he could not stand for the consulship owing to the delay in announcing his candidacy, which was caused by the charge of extortion levied against him. His affiliation with like-minded persons, among others, 'a young noble called Gnaeus Piso, a man of the utmost recklessness, poor, and given to intrigue, who was being goaded on by need of funds and an evil character to overthrow the government' (Sal. Cat. 18. 4) is noteworthy. Catiline gathered for himself men who shared 'the same view of what is good and evil; for agreement in likes and dislikes' (Sal. Cat. 20. 3-4). To these, Catiline made the following call to a revolution:

Because of this, all influence, power, rank, and wealth are in their hands, or wherever they wish them to be; to us they have left danger, defeat, prosecutions, and poverty. How long, pray, will you endure this, brave hearts? Is it not better to die valiantly, than ignominiously to lose our wretched and dishonoured lives after being the sport of others' insolence? Assuredly (I swear it by the faith of gods and men!) victory is within our grasp. We are in the prime of life, we are stout of heart; to them, on the contrary, years and riches have brought utter dotage. We need only to strike; the rest will take care of itself. Pray, what man with the spirit of a man can endure that our tyrants should abound in riches, to squander in building upon the sea and in levelling mountains, while we lack the means to buy the bare necessities of life? That they should join their palaces by twos or even more, while we have nowhere a hearthstone? They amass paintings, statuary and chased vases, tear down new structures and erect others, in short misuse and torment their wealth in every way; yet, with the utmost extravagance, they cannot get the upper hand of their riches. But we have destitution at home, debt without, present misery and a still more hopeless future; in short, what have we left, save only the wretched breath of life? Awake then! Lo, here, here before your eyes, is the freedom for which you have often longed, and with-it riches, honour, and glory; Fortune offers all these things as prizes to the victors (Sal. Cat. 20. 8-16).

First, according to the speech above, Catiline identified wealthy members of the ruling class as selfish. They allegedly monopolised 'all influence, power, rank, and wealth' and assigned 'danger, defeat, prosecutions, and poverty' to others. Next, by using the expression, 'brave hearts', he suggested that it would be cowardly and dishonourable to continue to bear humiliating treatments that the luxurious living of the oppressors had made their lot, thereby rousing the people to immediate action. Catiline urged his audience to muster up all manly strength to 'strike' and liberate the oppressed from 'misery and a still more hopeless future'. As it were, he brandished 'prizes to the victors'.

Striking is the thought that the above words 'fell upon the ears of men who had misfortune of every kind in excess' (Sal. Cat. 21. 1). Catiline's turning in the direction of the aggrieved, whose minds were already attuned to his ploy, was a good demonstration of Machiavellian tactics. Since the men were desperate for even more rewards, 'Catiline promised abolition of debts, the proscription of the rich, offices, priesthoods, plunder, and all the other spoils that war and the license of victors can offer' (Sal. Cat. 21. 2). While promises of 'plunder', 'spoils' and 'license' would make the venture appear profitable, a scheme that made fellow Romans victims of the pillaging as well as the selfish gratification was bereft of genuine interest in the commonwealth. Such disposition, however, was in the character of Sallust's Catiline. The desperation and, perhaps, crudity, of the politician could be further imagined as 'he heaped maledictions upon all good citizens, lauded each of his own followers by name; he reminded one of his poverty, another of his ambition, several of their danger or disgrace, many of the victory of Sulla, which they had found a source of booty' (Sal. Cat. 21. 4). Catiline's approach got the desired results and, with the miens of a General who contemplates victory before going to a war, after the people's 'spirits were all aflame, he dismissed the meeting, urging them to have his candidacy at heart' (Sal. Cat. 21. 5).

The aggressive pursuit of power knew no bounds and in a fetish performance typical of those who stop at nothing to succeed, Catiline, 'after finishing his address, compelled the participants in his crime to take an oath, he passed around bowls of human blood mixed with wine' (Sal. Cat. 22. 1). Such oath-taking was considered by Catiline indispensable to securing the allegiance of his co-conspirators. But, subsequent developments would soon show to what extent the sense of loyalty could be kept safe in a political association fraught with moral controversies of self-seekers.

### 5. More Moral Issues in Catiline's Conspiracy

Sallust goes on to associate the discovery of Catiline's plot against the state to another moral problem when he mentions 'Quintus Curius, a man of no mean birth but guilty of many shameful crimes, whom the censors had expelled from the senate because of his immorality' (Sal. Cat. 23. 1.), (*Italics are mine*). The Roman senate evidently had moral issues to contend with and Sallust here cites an instance of the measures taken by the body to expunge the bad eggs. Nevertheless, the executive cum legislative arm of government was limited in its ability to forestall morally bankrupt politicians from forming clandestine alliances with birds of the same feather, which Rome did not suffer its dearth at the time. Such was the case with Quintus Curius' in the Cataline's cohorts. Arguably, Curius personality would be the undoing of Catiline as Sallust next reports:

This man was as untrustworthy as he was reckless; he could neither keep secret what he had heard nor conceal even his own misdeeds He had an intrigue of long standing with Fulvia, a woman of quality, and when he began to lose her favour because poverty compelled him to be less lavish, he suddenly fell to boasting, began to promise her seas and mountains, and sometimes to threaten his mistress with the steel if she did not bow to his will; in brief, to show much greater assurance than before. But Fulvia, when she learned the cause of her lover's overbearing conduct, had no

thought of concealing such a peril to her country, but without mentioning the name of her informant she told a number of people what she had heard of Catiline's conspiracy from various sources (Sal. Cat. 23. 2-4).

Curius 'untrustworthy as he was reckless' in nature was no asset to the senate. Neither would his inability to 'keep secret what he had heard nor conceal even his own misdeeds' be of any use to Catiline's enterprise. Besides, his boastful and menacing bearings towards his estranged lover would only lead to her divulging of 'Catiline's conspiracy'. Loyalty and trustworthiness could not be guaranteed in Catiline's amalgam company of diverse and selfish interests.

As soon as the Roman nobles got wind of the treachery, they set aside their differences and supported Cicero for the consulship despite their reservations towards him as a *novus homo* (a new man); 'when danger came, jealousy and pride fell into the background' (Sal. Cat. 23. 5-6). Concerning how the imminent threat to the stability of the state should be handled; the nobility presented a common front against the man who saw the state's resources as spoils to plunder. Yet, Catiline, not deterred by this, became more precipitous. 'He increased his activity every day, made collections of arms at strategic points in Italy, and borrowed money on his own credit or that of his friends' (Sal. Cat. 24. 2).

Interestingly, further picture of moral degeneracy in politics is painted by Sallust's reference to women who 'at first had met their enormous expenses by prostitution, but later, when their time of life had set a limit to their traffic but not to their extravagance, had contracted a huge debt' (Sal. Cat. 24. 3). Since vice was more needed than any good quality for the undertaking, the women of easy virtue, Catiline reasoned, 'could tempt the city slaves to his side and set fire to Rome' (Sal. Cat. 24. 4).

Among the 'prostitutes' in Catiline's service, Sallust finds a particular one worthy of more remarks: 'Now among these women was Sempronia, who had often committed many crimes of masculine daring. In birth and beauty, in her husband also and children, she was abundantly favoured by fortune; well-read in the literature of Greece and Rome' (Sal. Cat. 25. 1-2). Sallust has consistently noted individuals of noble background who were self-seeking and shameful in their deeds. The historian now draws attention to a woman who is endowed with beauty and scholarship. He quickly underlines her wantonness by saying she is 'able to play the lyre and *dance more skilfully than an honest woman need, and having many other accomplishments which minister to voluptuousness*' (Sal. Cat. 25. 2), (Italics are mine). The historian further makes apparently deliberate effort to present a morally unworthy citizen, who Catiline found very valuable to his course, with the vilifying expression: 'there was nothing which she held so cheap as modesty and chastity...her desires were so ardent that she sought men more often than she was sought by them' (Sal. Cat. 25. 3). Sempronia's notoriety is further implicit in the statement: 'Even before the time of the conspiracy she had often broken her word, repudiated her debts, been privy to murder; poverty and extravagance combined had driven her headlong' (Sal. Cat. 25. 3). Sallust highlights a mischievous ambivalent personality when, referring to her, he says: 'she was a woman of no mean endowments; she could write verses, bandy jests, and use language which was modest, or tender, or wanton; in fine, she possessed a high degree of wit and of charm' (Sal. Cat. 25. 5).

With these companions, Catiline's machinery to usurp power was well in motion and the overall atmosphere became tense when, with the knowledge of his ploy, securities of the state were beefed up by the senate. Sallust vividly describes this situation thus:

These precautions struck the community with terror, and the aspect of the city was changed. In place of extreme gaiety and frivolity, the fruit of long-continued peace, there was sudden and general gloom. Men were uneasy and apprehensive, put little confidence in any place of security or in any human being, were neither at war nor at peace, and measured the peril each by his own fears. The women, too, whom the greatness of our country had hitherto shielded from the terrors of war, were in a pitiful state of anxiety, raised suppliant hands to heaven, bewailed the fate of their little children, asked continual questions, trembled at everything, and throwing aside haughtiness and self-indulgence, despaired of themselves and of their country (Sal. Cat. 31. 1-3).

The civil and political anxiety notwithstanding, 'Catiline's pitiless spirit persisted' (Sal. Cat. 31. 4). He made a bold appearance in the senate to defend himself like a victim of malicious defamation of character. He argued that he 'had so ordered his life from youth up...They must not suppose that he, a patrician, who like his forefathers had rendered great service to the Roman people, would be benefited by the overthrow of the government' (Sal. Cat. 31. 7). The senate refusing to be swayed by the façade of patriotism, rebuffed him as a traitor. Then, Catiline would no longer conceal his boisterous nature, and 'in a transport of fury he cried: "Since I am brought to bay by my enemies and driven desperate, I will put out my fire by general devastation' (Sal. Cat. 31. 9). Under the pretence of going on a voluntary exile, Catiline pursued his conspiracy.

Yet there were citizens who from sheer perversity were bent upon their own ruin and that of their country (Sal. Cat. 36. 4). Sallust offers reasons why the clamour for change authored by Catiline gained so much ground, he says:

But the city populace in particular acted with desperation for many reasons. To begin with, all who were especially conspicuous for their shamelessness and impudence, those too who had squandered their patrimony in riotous living, finally all whom disgrace or crime had forced to leave home, had all flowed into Rome as into a cesspool. Many, too, who recalled Sulla's victory, when they saw common soldiers risen to the rank of senator, and others become so rich that they feasted and lived like kings, hoped each for himself for like fruits of victory, if he took the field. Besides this, the young men who had maintained a wretched existence by manual labour in the country, tempted by public and private doles had come to prefer idleness in the city to their hateful toil; these, like all the others, battered on the

public ills. Therefore, it is not surprising that men who were beggars and without character, with illimitable hopes, should respect their country as little as they did themselves. Moreover, those to whom Sulla's victory had meant the proscription of their parents, loss of property, and curtailment of their rights, looked forward in a similar spirit to the issue of a war. Finally, all who belonged to another party than that of the senate preferred to see the government overthrown rather than be out of power themselves. Such, then, was the evil which after many years had returned upon the state. (Sal. Cat. 37. 4-11).

Although economic and political reasons are mentioned, Sallust seems most interested in the moral reasons. The expression 'to begin with', is followed by 'all who were especially conspicuous for their shamelessness and impudence, those too who had squandered their patrimony in riotous living, finally all whom disgrace or crime had forced to leave home'. Further reinforcing the notion of moral deficiency as the precursor of deep political crisis, he later goes on to say: 'Therefore, it is not surprising that, men who were beggars and without character, with illimitable hopes, should respect their country as little as they did themselves'. Sallust's account does not fail to incline the reader's mind to what happens 'when the control of the government falls into the hands of men who are incompetent or bad' (Sal. Cat. 51. 27).

Historical allusion is made to the reign of terror by the Thirty Tyrants at Athens which executed 'without a trial the most wicked and generally hated citizens, whereat the people rejoiced greatly and declared that it was well done. But afterwards their licence gradually increased, and the tyrants slew good and bad alike at pleasure and intimidated the rest' (Sal. Cat. 51. 28-30). Mentioned is similarly made of 'the massacre [which] did not end until Sulla glutted all his followers with riches' (Sal. Cat. 51. 34). Although the instances were cited in warning against following bad precedents when punishing the unsuccessful team of Catiline's conspirators, the references equally predict what awaited the state in the event of the person of Catiline securing the highest office.

## 6. Conclusion

Sallust's *Bellum Catalinae* is rich in expressions that depict moral decadence in politics and the writer has said a lot to portray the politics as no school of morality. The historian would expect virtuous behaviours from a politician but he laments that 'shamelessness, bribery and rapacity held sway' in his time. First, pointing to the corrupt aristocracy, he briefly describes how ambitious men, such as Sulla, gained control of the state's apparatus and jettisoned all moral considerations. Sallust portrays men who were so impious that they polluted the temples and inundated the altars of the gods with blood of the innocent to reach their goals. Covetous of other people's possessions and putting their personal interests ahead of concerns for the commonwealth, the self-serving politicians gratified themselves and their supporters by fabricating mischiefs. According to Sallust, the aristocrats recklessly handed themselves over to profiting from the state to support extravagant life; cunningly as well as brazenly, they manipulated the laws to murder their opponents or proscribe them and confiscate their property.

Second, Sallust apparently suggests that public woes begin when morally deficient individuals become powerful in politics. He characterises Catiline as a heinous and depraved character who took so much delight in civil disturbances, killing, plundering and disgraceful political intrigues from childhood. This explains his alarming and menacing behaviours during the elections of 63 B.C. Compelling his co-conspirator to take an oath, which was validated with human blood mixed with wine, betrayed both desperation and barbarism. While societal influence may not be ruled out in understanding the person of Catiline, Sallust's would make his reader think of an individual with "congenital" moral depravity.

Third, Sallust's Catiline had enough prospective accomplices. Readily available were the young inexperienced ones whose emotions could easily be swayed. Then, there were those who groaned under the burden of debt and became desperate as well as reckless. Even among upper classes, Sallust presents the Roman society that suffered no dearth of men who thrive on plunders and spoils. Catiline's associates in conspiracy included disreputable men and women of high birth. Sallust credits some of these with intelligence but never fails to link them to immoderateness, greed untrustworthiness, recklessness, immorality, shameful conducts and every other form of infamy.

Overall, Sallust *Bellum Catalinae* unquestionably could be interpreted as a strong warning against ignoring the morality of public office seekers. The historian is never short of words in portraying the unscrupulous elements that infiltrated politics and made the realm noxious. He personally witnessed the viciousness and greediness of office holders and he might be viewed as recommending that men with degrading conducts should not be allowed in the corridor of power. The practicality or attainability of such end, especially, when winning an election almost always tends to be a game of number and material influence, is a possible subject for further study.

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